

By 30 June 1950 it had become necessary to remove the stove, sink and wash basin from buildings T2 and T4 because hooligans had tampered with the stove. The Public Works Department estimated that the work would cost £5. Although permission was granted for the items to be removed and handed over to the Public Works Department for safekeeping, the O.C. Cape Command informed the O.C. 2 Coase Regiment (formerly 2 Heavy Battery) that one of his artisans must do this work.

The wartime agreement was due to expire on 27 May 1953, so the Secretary for Defence timeously requested the QMG to advise him whether it should be extended. On 1 August 1952 the O.C. Coastal Command advised the QMG and Naval and Marine Chief of Staff that Blue Gums still formed "a link in the general framework of the Simon's Town defences" and that it was essential that the road be retained. He requested that "negotiation should be opened in order to secure occupation for a further period of 10 years".

Coast Artillery became obsolete in South Africa in 1955 and resulted in the disbandment of the SA Corps of Marines on 1 October 1955. Thus on 31 December 1956 the Naval Chief of Staff advised the QMG that Blue Gums FOP was "no longer a requirement for coast artillery and did not justify the purchase of the site". The site and FOP were to be returned to Mr. Day.

HMS NEPTUNE'S WAR TIME VOYAGE TO THE SOUTHERN OCEAN

Nigel Fawcett

On October 7th 1940 the British light cruiser HMS NEPTUNE, last peacetime flagship of the Africa Station, slipped stern first past the bullnose at Simon's Town, swung round and pointed her bows in a southerly direction to clear Hang-klip and head down towards the 'roaring forties' and south polar ice cap.

Why was it necessary to send such a valuable fighting ship far down below the regular shipping lanes at a time when she was urgently needed to help keep Britain's sea routes free of U-boats and commerce raiders?

NEPTUNE had proved herself to be an extremely efficient fighting unit of the Royal Navy in her first year of active service, from the moment she left Simon's Town on August 26th 1939 to take up her war station based on Freetown until her return 'home' (for Snoekie was still thought of as 'home' by most of her Devonport recruited staff's company) just over one year later. The first few months of the war had been spent patrolling the South Atlantic for weeks at a time with occasional brief spells in the tropical port of Freetown on the west coast of Africa to replenish stores and pick up eagerly awaited mail. Even refuelling was usually done at sea. The monotony of endless patrols was occasionally enlivened by incidents such as the hunt for the GRAF SPEE, but regrettably not the kill, and the interception of the German line ADOLF WOERMANN which scuttled herself before a boarding party could get to her.

But most of NEPTUNE's renown had been won in the Mediterranean where the ship had spent a hectic six months with almost daily Italian bombing attacks both at sea and in harbour at Alexandria. Her gunners had bagged an aircraft or two as well as bombarding positions along the Libyan coast in support of the army. Her big moment was her part in the fleet action off Calabria on July 9th 1940 when NEPTUNE had the honour to be the first British main o' war to hoist the signal "Enemy battlefleet in sight" since one of Nelson's frigates at Aboukir in 1798.

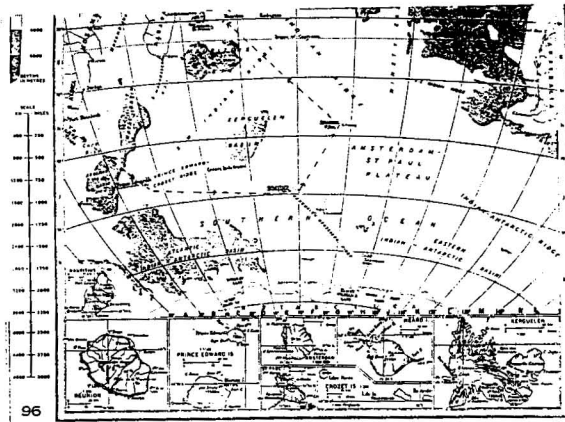
She left the Med. in August, long overdue for home leave with everyone on board confident that NEPTUNE's return the long way round via the Cape heralded her badly needed refit and recommissioning.

But the powers that be had other plans.

German raiders had been extremely active in the South Atlantic, sinking British shipping, and some were still at large. The question puzzling the Admiralty was what had they done with the British survivors?

These raiders, designed to spend months at sea without returning to base, had only cramped quarters and could not possibly imprison hundreds of seamen as well. There were not many islands in the South Atlantic where prisoners could be hidden, for St. Helena, Ascension, Tristan, the Falklands and even South Georgia were all British and in radio touch with the outside world. But in the Southern Ocean, that wild sea that circles the globe in high latitudes, there were islands where it was possible to conceal men for months. A study of charts showed that the most likely hide-out was Kerguelen, a large, lonely island situated almost 50 degrees south.

Three days out of Simon's Town, the temperature dropped alarmingly and was soon down in the 30's. On the fourth day they sighted Prince Edward and Marion Is. then completely deserted but now manned by S.A. Government weather stations. The ship heve-to as close inshore as she could manoeuvre with safety, but there was no sign of human habitation.



TRACK CHART "HMS NEPTUNE" - OCTOBER 1940
SCALE 1:100,000,000